CHINESE ATTITUDES TO NATURE

Idea and Reality

YI-FU TUAN

The thirty-sixth George Ernest Morrison lecture in ethnology 1975

AUSTRALIAN N[illegible]BERRA 1976

CHINESE ATTITUDES TO NATURE

Idea and Reality

YI-FU TUAN

The thirty-sixth George Ernest Morrison lecture in ethnology 1975

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CANBERRA 1976

First published in Australia 1976
Printed at the SocPac Printery for the
Australian National University, Canberra

ISBN 0 7081 0743 5

CHINESE ATTITUDES TO NATURE

Attitudes are elusive. They show the deep ambivalence that is characteristic of human feelings. Our strongest verbal affirmations may well hide a grain of negation, and vice versa. Do we like the countryside or the city? "The countryside, of course," says Western man, brain-washed by long exposure to pastoral poetry and real-estate posters. And yet the city has its undeniable charms. There are times when in the peace of the countryside – interrupted only by the cry of blackbirds – we dream of a night with Joan Sutherland at the opera.

What are Chinese attitudes to nature? Literary sources have often provided the answer. Chinese attitudes can be extracted from the canonical writings on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Likewise, we catch a glimpse of Western environmental values through an eclectic reading of the Bible, the philosophies of science, and Wordsworth. Evidence from classical literature can be very revealing. It reveals a culture's high aspirations. But it is also partial. It tells us little how people actually behave toward the environment and it gives us little insight as to how common people – as distinct from the educated élite – respond to nature.

Western scholars who know China only through her poetry, philosophy, and landscape painting tend to have a romantic image of the country and her people. And this image may be strengthened by a casual acquaintance with the countryside. How beautiful the rice terraces look from the train window! With what infinite care the Chinese farmers have laboured over their small plots of land. This is true. The rice landscapes of South China have the beauty of well-tended gardens, and the Chinese farmers have – through the millennia of labour – enriched rather than exhausted the soil and biotic communities of the alluvial plains.

All this is correct but it presents a lopsided picture. Let me illustrate the risks of the literary and romantic approach with a pedagogical device that I

have used on my students in the United States. American students, like youths elsewhere, are full of ideals. They are disillusioned, however, with Western technology which has wrought irreparable damage to their environment; they look to the wisdom of the East for guidance. I feel flattered but whereas a guru's job is to sooth a teacher's job is to sow doubt. I say to them, "Pretend that I am a Chinese mandarin enamoured with American culture. While in China I diligently read the works of Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. Coming to the United States I would tour the quaint New England towns, savor the life style of a rich Middle Western farmer, and visit a selection of the great National Parks of the American West. In these parks I would be told that they were set aside for the enjoyment of Americans and their posterity long before the country experienced anything like population pressure. I would return to China full of admiration for the wisdom of the West and bemoan my country's own careless use of resources."

To correctly gauge China's attitudes to nature it is important to remember that China is an old civilization. Civilization can be defined more or less as we wish. Central to the concept, however, is organized power. Civilization embodies power. When we think of power over nature we are perhaps inclined to call up images of drills and bulldozers, smoking chimneys and nuclear plants. But long before the age of technology power lay in organizing masses of human beings. Organized human beings, as Lewis Mumford pointed out, were our first megamachines. Human bulldozers could be as effective in transforming nature as mechanical ones. The People's Republic, especially in the early years, made use of large teams of men and women to build dams, reservoirs, irrigation ditches, canals, and roads. This is nothing new. Throughout history the Chinese have used organized human labor on massive works of construction. A great capital city could be raised out of the countryside in a matter of a few years. Thousands and even tens of thousands of people were and are conscripted for monumental public works.

The second point to remember is that, given time, even individuals and small family teams can wholly alter the face of the earth if there are enough of them. By the year 2 A.D. China's population already approached 50 million. The bulk of the people lived in the Huang Ho basin and in Ssu-ch'uan. Land use was locally intense, and it is probable that the rural landscape surrounding Ch'eng-tu, established almost two thousand years ago, showed little change in basic physiognomy since. From the fourth century onward population spread rapidly into the Yangtze valley and into southeastern China; but as late as the middle of the eighth century, the Yangtze plains and

areas farther south still held only 40 to 45 per cent of China's people. By the end of the thirteenth century this area reported no less than 85 percent of the nation's population. As the people moved south the subtropical and tropical environments in turn came under the human dominion and were transformed to suit human needs.

The plant world suffered the most conspicuous change. In primeval times, forests and woodlands could have covered almost half of the present territory of China. By the early decades of the twentieth century they were reduced to occupying less than 9 percent of the nation's area. It is clear that Chinese philosophy and religion, so benign to nature in their fundamental tenets, could do little to preserve nature from man. What drove the Chinese to transform the biotic mantle so drastically? What forces were at their disposal? Certain general answers apply to China as they do to other civilized parts of the world. Thus fire is almost universally used by man to clear forests. Forests are removed to create more arable and grazing land. Timber is needed for building houses, palaces, and cities; for the construction of ships; for domestic and industrial fuel, and as raw material for pulp mills. Then again a forest may be pushed back because it harbours dangerous animals and bandits, or simply because it is rather merry to see the trees and grass go up in flame. There are, of course, differences of means and motives from one culture to another. In contrast to the Mediterranean world, for example, China's vegetation suffered less from hungry sheep and goats, and from the voracious appetite of the maritime powers' shipbuilding industry. On the other hand, China's forests suffered more from the demands of her swarming populace, from the requirements of construction in which timber is the basic material, and the need for domestic fuel. We are accustomed to think of China as industrially primitive. It is perhaps useful to remind ourselves that the Sung dynasty not only produced landscape paintings of ethereal loveliness but also witnessed a mini "industrial revolution", one which has had severe impact on the country's forest resources. Forests were ravaged for the making of charcoal as an industrial fuel. From the tenth century onward the metal industries expanded rapidly. They swallowed up many hundreds of thousands of tons of charcoal each year, as did the manufacture of salt, alum, bricks, tiles, and liquor. Robert Hartwell calculates that in the year 1080, if only charcoal had been used, a forest of 22,000 medium-sized trees would have been needed to mint iron and copper cash alone. The demand for wood and charcoal as both household and industrial fuel was so great that it could

not be met. Coal had to be substituted and was increasingly used since the Sung period. Marco Polo – remember? – marvelled at the burning of black stone.

We appreciate what is scarce. Even in the Eastern Chou period (lasting roughly from the 8th to the 3rd century B.C.) the threat to forests was recognized. The threat came from the expansion of agriculture and from the building of large cities. In the *Shi Ching* (or Book of Poetry), which includes some of China's earliest literary works, we find evidence that trees were appreciated in lines like these:

On the hill were lovely trees,
Both chestnut and plum trees.
Cruel brigands tore them up;
But no one knew of their crime.

Trees were a resource and a blessing. As another poem put it,

So thick grow those oaks
That the people never lack for firewood.
Happiness to our lord!
May the spirits always have rewards for him.

In the *Chou Li* (or Record of Rites which was compiled in the 3rd century B.C. but which may well include earlier material), we find mentioned two offices concerned with conservation. One was the inspectorate of mountains and the other the inspectorate of forests, with overlapping functions. The inspectors of mountains were charged with the care of mountain forests. They supervized conservation measures and saw to it that certain species of trees were preserved. In the *Chou Li* we learn that the people could cut trees only at specified times. At other times wood cutting was allowed in case of urgent need, such as when coffins had to be made or dykes strengthened, but even then certain areas must remain untouched. The proper use of resource was a function of good government. In the *Mencius* the sage advised King Huai of Liang that he would not lack for wood if he permitted the people to cut trees only at the proper season.

Through China's long history, perspicacious officials have issued periodic warnings against the dire consequences of deforestation. Some of these warnings sound like tracts issued from a modern soil conservation bureau. For example, a scholar of the 16th century had this to say concerning Shan-hsi, a province in North China: "Wood from the southern mountains was cut without a year's rest. The people took advantage of the barren mountain surface and converted it into farms. If heaven were to send down a torrent, nothing

would be there to obstruct the flow of water. In the morning the torrent falls on the southern mountains; in the evening, when it reaches the plains, its angry waves will swell in volume and break embankments causing frequent changes in the course of the river."

Scholars of the late Ming dynasty deplored the stripping of forest cover not only because of its effect on stream flow and on the quality of the soil in the lowlands, but also – interestingly enough – because of their belief that the forests on mountain ridges protected China from the horse-riding barbarians. As one official put it, "I saw the fact that what the country relies on as strategically important is the mountain, and what the mountain relies on as a screen to prevent advance are the trees." Officials also recognized that mountains owed much of their aesthetic appeal to the vegetation cover. They were concerned with the reputation of the Wu-t'ai mountains in northern Shan-hsi, asking "since the mountains have become almost bare, what remained to keep them famous?"

Expressions of concern over the state of nature, such as the ones I have quoted, indicate that the Chinese – throughout their long history – have appreciated the need for conservation. On the other hand, remember that this awareness was itself provoked by recurrent environmental crises. The Chinese abused their land not out of overweening pride, not out of any belief that man had dominion over nature and so could ride roughshod over it. The abuse came willy-nilly out of two attributes of civilization: organized human power and quickly rising population. A culture becomes civilization if it no longer needs to submit to nature and mother earth; if it can build monuments – ziggurats, pyramids, and cities – for the sky gods and for men with immortal longings.

China, as a highly organized society of large population, had power. In its construction works it could afford to overlook the minor facial features of the earth. Consider the building of the capital city of Ch'ang-an during the Sui and T'ang dynasties. The city was laid on new ground and on an unprecedented scale. It was a monument. It demonstrated the triumph of the cosmic principle of order and rectilinearity over the earth principle of complex harmony and curved lines. Geomantic properties of the site were studied, but unlike the building of villages and rural roads the region's topographical character had little effect on the city's geometric design. The design reflected, rather, astronomical principles. Astronomers played an important role in laying out the city's frame: they measured the shadow of the noon sun on successive days and observed the North Star by night in order to arrive at

accurate alignments of the city walls to the four directions. In the course of building Ch'ang-an, which enclosed an area of some 31 square miles, villages were levelled and trees uprooted; broad and straight avenues were laid down at right angles to each other. Straight rows of trees were planted. In Ch'ang-an the superposition of man's and heaven's order on natural terrain was complete. Or rather not quite complete, if we accept the charming story of why one great old locust tree stood out of line. It had been retained from the old landscape because the chief architect had sat under it as he supervised the construction. The tree was spared by special order from the emperor who wished to honour his architect.

The monumental and geometrical city is evidence of human power. But so is the landscape garden. The formal European garden, with its topiary art-works and rectilinear avenues, speaks loudly of human arrogance; it is very different from the naturalistic Chinese garden. Yet, by the crude test of the total tonnage of earth removed there may not be so much difference between the two artifacts. In North America the admired parks are works of nature. In China, by contrast, some of the most famous scenic areas are works of man rather than of geologic processes. Hang-chou's West Lake, for example, was celebrated by T'ang and Sung poets and it remains to this day an adornment of China. To the casual visitor, the West Lake region exemplifies how human works can blend modestly into nature's magistral frame. But the pervasiveness of nature is largely an illusion created by art. Some of the islands in the lake are actually man-made. The lake itself is artificial and has to be maintained with care. Since the thirteenth century peasants were recruited to clear and enlarge the lake, to keep it from being cluttered up by vegetation and silt. Hang-chou's environs, then, owe much of their calm harmonious beauty to human design and effort. Size gives the West Lake region a feeling of open nature. The architects and gardeners have a large area to work with. When we come down to the small compass of the private garden the illusion of pervasive nature is far more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless the Chinese gardener strives to achieve it with cleverly placed water-worn limestone the jagged outlines of which suggest wildness, and he does it by means of winding footpaths that give the stroller an illusion of depth and space. In this line Oriental man's ultimate triumph lies in the miniature garden, where wild nature is reduced to the scale of a dwarf landscape that can be fitted into a bowl.

Power is manifest in organized human and animal brigades and in machines. Such power can transform the environment. Power is also a habit of mind

that may find actualization in canals, roads, and cities – or in landscape painting. We don't normally think of landscape painting as an expression of power. Yet in an important sense it is. A landscape painting demonstrates man's ability to organize; it organizes the complexity of nature into simple and comprehensible forms, and it reduces the vastness of nature to a frame so modest that it can be hung on the wall of a living room. As an art form landscape painting is a late achievement in both China and Europe. In both civilizations it flourished at a time when successes were scored in other fields of endeavour. Landscape painting emerged out of the creative energies of the European Renaissance. In China it prospered during the Sung period, when the empire also made rapid strides in such virile activities as metallurgy, regional trade and shipping. Art is a technique for reducing nature to manageable human scale. It civilizes mountains, rivers, and forests which in their raw state dwarf and humble man. Art scales down. An important exception is in the portrayal of people and of anthropomorphized gods; it is then common practice – as in monumental sculptures – to exaggerate their size.

Before the industrial revolution society used human machines to subdue nature. But human beings, if there are enough of them, can alter the environment through the cumulative effect of individual needs – quite without the conscious desire to dominate nature. Power is simply an effect of large numbers. Even the most civilized and benign of activities can damage the environment if enough men and women practise them. Buddhism, for example, is a benign philosophy. In China it deserves credit for the preservation of trees around temple compounds, for the islands of green in brown denuded landscapes. On the other hand, Buddhism introduced to China the idea of cremating the dead. From the tenth to the fourteenth century cremation was sufficiently widespread in the densely populated southeastern coastal provinces to have taxed severely the timber resources of that area. Another case of unexpected consequences was brought to light by the researches of Edward Schafer. It would seem that the most civilized of arts could have depilated much of North China. The art was writing, which required soot from burnt pine for making black ink. As the vast T'ang bureaucracy continued to expand and more and more busy brushes put ink to paper, the T'ai-hang mountains grew rapidly bald.

So far I have focused on what the Chinese have done to their natural environment. Through the centuries and millennia they have produced landscapes of outstanding loveliness and productivity; on the other hand they

have often been unwise in their treatment of forest and soil resources. If I have tended to point to the negative side of the picture I am not only exercising the prerogative of a native to criticize his homeland, I also wish to correct what I feel to be false and sentimentalized images of China. I should like to turn now more specifically to attitudes. Attitudes may be considered as intellectual postures and beliefs and as sentiments. Consider, first, attitudes as more or less conceptualized beliefs. It is a characteristic of traditional societies to view nature as made up of cyclical and reciprocal processes. China is no exception. What people desire is harmony and harmony holds when forces in nature and society are interrelated and mutually responsible. Any action has repercussions which eventually reach back to itself. Harmony is broken when an agent or force acts arbitrarily in disregard of consequences to others and, in the long run, to itself. Perhaps the underlying ethic of this belief is piety, the Chinese *hsiao* and the Roman *pietas*. Piety means reverence, with the added senses of affection, pity, compassion, and propitiation. People propitiate the strong and are compassionate toward the weak. It may seem strange that the single concept of reverence, or piety, should contain feelings that are opposed. The apparent incompatibility, however, disappears if we take in a broad time-span rather than the moment, and if we remember that reciprocity lies at the core of piety.

What is piety? This idea, so powerful in traditional China, played an equally important role in ancient Rome. Consider the legend associated with the temple which was erected in Rome to the goddess pietas. The story goes that on the site of the temple a mother was once imprisoned and had been kept alive by the milk from her own daughter's breast. Carl Kerenyi comments on this legend thus: "The special thing which here stands out is something bodily and spiritual at the same time. Pietas here shows itself as a form of absolute reciprocity in nature, a completely closed circle of giving and receiving. In some variants of the story the mother's place is taken by the father. But the example thus revered is always this same natural circle of reciprocity." This Roman legend should strike a familiar chord among the Chinese, for exemplary filial piety in China is told repeatedly in stories of how the son or daughter uses his or her own flesh to make a nutritious broth for the sick mother.

In China as in ancient Rome, the father's legal power over his children was nearly absolute. Parents, however, are mortal and grow weak with age as their offspring gain strength; parents not only command but *need* service. Need is symptomatic of lack: filial piety calls for compassion as well as

reverence. The spirits that preside over nature have power over men, but they also need human offerings. Land supports men and at the same time requires human care. The term "piety" covers relationships not only among men, but also between man and the gods, and man and nature; in fact the three relationships are closely interwoven. In the *Li Chi* we find this rule: "To fell a single tree, or kill a single animal, not at the proper season is contrary to *hsiao.*" In the *Hsiao Ching,* a work compiled sometime between 350 and 200 B.C., Confucius is made to say, "Filiality is the first principle of heaven, the ultimate standard of the earth, the norm of conduct for the people. Men ought to follow the pattern of heaven and earth which leads them by the brightness of the heavens and the benefits of the earth to harmonize all under heaven." *Hsiao* not only enjoins a posture of reverence toward superiors; it includes the notion of duty of ruler to subject, parents to children; for without reciprocity there cannot be harmony. The recognition that duties and obligations are mutual extends beyond the web of human relations to nature. In old times, to quote the *Hsiao Ching* again, "the illustrious kings served heaven intelligently because they were filial in the service of their mothers . . . And because heaven was well served and earth honoured, the spirits manifested themselves with brilliance."

The ideal of reciprocity in a complex civilization is distorted by the notion of rank. In the traditional Chinese view, the mother elicits love or affection, the prince honour or reverence, but the father commands both affection and reverence. Father and mother are not equal in dignity; neither are heaven and earth. Just as hierarchy exists among people, so it exists among the forces of nature. Chinese rationalism and bureaucratic turn of mind seek to classify both society and nature in a hierarchical system. Only the emperor, for example, had the prerogative to sacrifice to heaven and earth. He alone could claim to be a universal figure. The princes of the feudal states had no right to set their sights so high. Like the emperor they had their ancestral temples and their altars to the gods of soil and crops. They performed rites to the spirits of rivers and mountains, but only to those within their territories. Rivers, mountains, and forests were sacred powers *(shên),* capable of controlling weather and of regulating the seasons. They clearly mattered to the farming populace. They were made comprehensible and a part of the Chinese world view by being given human ranks and titles commensurate with their power. In the universal hierarchy their positions appeared to lie below that of the emperor. The *Shi Ching,* for instance, speaks of how all the spirits, including those of rivers and mountains, were submissive to the early kings of the Chou dynasty.

In China the emperor was regarded as semi-divine in his life-time and he retained this status after death. The land surrounding the tombs of the sacred emperors served as natural parks in which all living things partook of the holy character of the spirit of the deceased. But the burial sites of ordinary folk were and are perceived less as sources of power than as the conduits of power emanating from the countryside. This, then, is the principle of Chinese geomancy *(fêng shui)*, which holds that "if a man is buried in a properly sited grave, his descendants will prosper; and that the siting of houses, cities, and whole regions similarly works good or ill for their inhabitants." Fêng shui is simultaneously a pietistic faith and a self-serving technique. Its purpose is to channel the powers in the landscape through the grave or house site for the benefit of the living. Fêng shui is preoccupied with success. A funeral prayer commonly opens with an address to the spirits of rivers and mountains; it ends with the supplication that the descendants of the dead may include many males, who will become prosperous and assume high office.

How to make sense of the world? How to ensure survival and even prosperity? These are perennial human concerns. In traditional China, at a conceptual level, the answer lay in integrating the spirits of nature with human society. The honor and duty incumbent on people of different ranks are extended to nature's hierarchy; and just as one can supplicate a human official for favours to one can ask favours of nature when one's own efforts are of no avail.

Human efforts are of no avail? Must we plead with the forces of nature – droughts and floods in particular – which hold us in thrall? Modern China says no, of course; but it has been a rather timid no. Under Communism the no to nature is resounding. For the first time nature is systematically desacralized. Geomancers are disgraced. The spirits of mountains and rivers, local demons and ghosts, are all exorcised. Like the ghosts of reaction and imperialism, they are all made to flee before the peasant hero armed with the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung. Nature is the enemy. It is to be subdued by human labor and technology. In the collection *Songs of the Red Flag*, published in 1959, we find such titles as "Every Hand's as Busy as Can Be", and "Change Your Abacus for a Computer." Computers should be home made, and that takes time. So the stress in party literature is on how even modest tools can achieve monumental results. Is the mountain in the way? Remove it! The mountain is the "contradiction" which Mao urges man to struggle against "with revolutionary spirit".

Sensitive Western ecologists shudder at the rhetoric of "battle" and "conquest" when applied to the natural world. They regard that attitude as a phase of their own adolescent past. In the affluent West, dewy-eyed preservationists tend to view nature as a fragile "web of life", not to be touched – or touched only with tender loving care. Contemporary China cannot afford such a view. To feed the people and provide a living standard worthy of man, nature must be transformed and forced to support human needs. Nature itself appears to have an ironic sense of humor. Under centuries of Taoism and Buddhism it turns brown and sends periodic floods to play havoc with people's lives; under militant Communism it turns green and is relatively benign. If one should doubt this change, compare China of the 1920s with the People's Republic of today. Who can read Mallory's book, *China: Land of Famine,* published in 1926, without a sense of sorrow – and of relief that it belonged to an ineffectual – though not distant – past?

I have discussed attitude as conceptualized beliefs. I should like to turn very briefly to attitude as sentiment. Sentiment for nature is most delicately revealed in poetry and landscape painting. Before this vast and complex field I drop all pretence to scholarly discretion, and wish to offer here merely a few untutored comments. With regard to Chinese poetry I am impressed not only by its awareness of nature but by its insistently sad and wistful mood. After all, a common theme is separation. For a densely peopled country, it is curious that the poems do not suggest overcrowding. On the contrary, they frequently yield a sense of great distances and of uninhabited space. The country is large, communication is poor, and the friend or lover one wants to be with is always elsewhere, as these lines from a work of the Han period seem to say:

On and on, going on and on,
away from you to live apart,
ten thousand li and more between us,
each at opposite ends of the sky.
The road I travel is steep and long;
who knows when we meet again?

Nature is sensitively observed. We may ask, does it console? The famous T'ang poet Li Po (701-762) says it does:

If you were to ask me why I dwell among green mountains,
I shall laugh silently; my soul is serene.
The peach-blossom follows the moving water.
There is another heaven and earth beyond the world of men.

I do not find this type of expression fully convincing. Nature is too submissive to the poet's moods – too lacking, as it were, in independent obduracy – to give true comfort. In the collection, *Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang Dynasty*, Burton Watson notes that images of weather form the largest single category of nature images. This is not surprising for weather suppliantly reflects human feelings. Next to weather, flowers and birds most readily succumb to the poet's moods; they almost beg for subjective interpretation. Mountains and rivers, on the other hand, are more recalcitrant. In the poem "Spring Scene" (春望), Tu Fu (713-770) wafts to the edge of bathos when he writes: 感時花濺淚，恨別鳥驚心 "The flowers shed tears of grief for the troubled times, and the birds seem startled, as if with the anguish of separation." But he also notes: 國破山河在 . "The state may fall, but the hills and streams remain." They remain indifferent. This parallel presence of nature, unregarding of human sorrows, is a virile strain in Chinese poetic sentiment.

Chinese culture has many excellences. One that touches me personally is the feeling of peace and unforced happiness in a natural environment. Art, particularly landscape painting, bears witness to it; but perhaps even more impressive is the way that gentle and mellow mood settles on ordinary people in their hours of relaxation. Peace in nature is a fact of life, not only of art. The French writer Simone de Beauvoir puts it very well when she contrasts the frenzied atmosphere that surrounds a typical French picnic with the good-natured informality of a Chinese outing. In 1955 Simone de Beauvoir visited Communist China and spent an afternoon in the play grounds of the Summer Palace outside Peking. She captures the deep sanity of a people with this seemingly inconsequential observation: "In the middle of the lake", she writes, "I see a little boat: in it a young woman is lying down peacefully asleep while two youngsters are frisking about and playing with the oars. Our boatman cups his hands. 'Hey!' he calls. 'Look out for those kids!' The woman rubs her eyes, she smiles, picks up the oars, and shows the children how they work."

The Chinese feel profoundly at home on earth. We lack transcendental longings and the spirit of combativeness. Teilhard de Chardin, mystic and scientific evolutionist, once characterized the Chinese civilization as earth-bound and essentially Neolithic. Its spirit flows like a stream through the low-lying places. It lacks steel and rarely soars. Is there any truth in this observation? "O earth, my mother" is the title of Kuo Mo-jo's poem, reprinted in China in 1958:

O earth, my mother
I envy every living creature, the earthworm most of all;
only I do not envy the birds flying in the air,
they have left you to go their way in the air.

Thus wrote a man who for many years was the President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences under the Communist government. Not in this spirit could the Chinese have flung a satellite into the sky.

Christianity gave Western man a sense of his worth that transcends the bounds of nature – even death that ultimate bound to his aspirations. So a Dylan Thomas could plead with his dying father not to yield:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.

Vis-à-vis nature, we Chinese do not rage. It may be that Communism, which a theologian called Christian heresay, is teaching us to rage – teaching us not to accept limitations either in ourselves or in nature. Landscapes of mist and delicate loveliness, unscorched by summer or high noon, are ingrained in the Chinese soul. But they do not hold the stage in today's consciousness. Today we have strident man. Today it is human power – symbolized by giant statues raised to the hero-worker – that is glorified. What of the future? The future is anybody's guess. My own goes something like this. If the poetic spirit continues to burn in China, what course can it take? Will it not eventually fuse these two strains – quietism in the past and the new-found assertive pride – to create artworks of a more robust and searing beauty?